

FURTHER SALVAGE EXCAVATION ON HAMLINS HILL (N42/137), AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

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Hamlins Hill, some 60 metres high, is located between the Tamaki River and an upper reach of the Manukau Harbour a little to the north of the portage which linked the Waitemata and Manukau harbours of the east and west coasts respectively.

The uniqueness of certain features of N42/137, the archaeological site on the hill, have been recognised by archaeologists (Davidson 1970, p. 105). It is singular in its situation on a clay instead of a volcanic hill and also in the absence of surface evidence of earthwork fortification. It may well represent a functionally different class of site to the fortified volcanic cone sites more characteristic of the Auckland isthmus. Further, the site offers possibilities for the study of prehistoric subsistence strategies, being located close to a wide range of resource zones including those of volcanic soil and the two harbours. More distant resources would have been readily accessible by water. Finally, the proximity of the site to a line of prehistoric communication adds yet another dimension of study.

The site, which consists of surface evidence of pits and terraces, is spread out over a large area of the hill. However, part of it may have been destroyed in the past when a water reservoir was constructed at the summit.

In February 1969, Janet Davidson of the Auckland Institute and Museum carried out a salvage excavation on the smaller knoll to the east of the reservoir after discovering that it was to be quarried for spoil (Davidson 1970). Apart from a terrace which was examined with somewhat equivocal results, the major area of interest was in the excavation of several pits together with five squares on a flat area apparently in association with them. According to the priorities which are the attendant and necessary evil of rescue excavation with limited resources of time and labour, Davidson took advantage of the relatively simple stratigraphy and excavated on an extensive rather than an intensive basis. Structural features of some importance were discovered and partly uncovered but economic evidence on the site received correspondingly less emphasis. Nonetheless, between an estimated one-half to two-thirds of a small and discrete midden was excavated and certain general but tentative economic conclusions were drawn. These included observation of shellfish species present, minimum numbers of individuals, relative importance of species, size ranges of individuals and implications for gathering selectivity. In addition, other faunal remains and a small quantity of artifacts were described.

In essence, the evidence recovered pointed to the former existence at the site of three major classes of activity postulated by Groube (1965) for the domestic and communal units of Maori settlement (Davidson 1970). The three components consist

of underground storage pit, house and cooking area. All three elements were found on Hamlins Hill where it was considered that their relative spatial arrangement had altered through time. Basically the site appeared to represent an undefended and generalised living site of hamlet size. It is noted that in the excavated area there were problems in establishing the relative ages of the three elements. The material remains of cooking were generally superimposed over evidence of houses but it was difficult to establish the relative age of either of these to the pits by stratigraphic means.

The evidence for houses consisted of at least two superimposed structures of a type also encountered at excavations at two swamp sites at Lake Mangakaware in the Waikato (Bellwood 1969, 1971; Peters 1971). So in addition to the other unusual characteristics mentioned above, Hamlins Hill was producing evidence for the size and structure of houses which have long been an elusive element in the New Zealand archaeological record. However, due to shortage of time, it was not possible to uncover the complete structures. Their total size and complete plan remained unknown (Davidson 1970, Fig. 4). On account of the unresolved problems, a further small-scale rescue excavation was undertaken in August 1969 by the present author who had already assisted Miss Davidson with the first excavations. The emphasis was on the structural evidence while the midden received relatively cursory attention. The major concern was to excavate in plan before the site was quarried.

EXCAVATION

Four 2.5 metre squares were laid out as a continuation of Davidson's grid. Accordingly they were serially labelled 6, 7, 8 and 9 (Fig. 1). The squares were separated by 50 cm baulks. Square 6 was located immediately west of Davidson's Square 4, while Square 7 was adjacent to her Square 1. Subsequently the baulks between the initial excavation and the writer's extension were removed. The effect of this was that the major section b - b¹ (Fig. 2; see also Davidson 1970, Figs. 2 and 5), now applied to the north-south axis along the eastern side of the new excavation. The stratigraphic relationship of the two excavations was established. Finally a metre-wide extension was dug south from Square 6 in an attempt to establish a stratigraphic link with Pit B (Fig. 2). Generally, the overall stratigraphy proved to be as described for the earlier excavation, namely ". . . a thin layer of topsoil without cultural material, then a layer of dark sooty soil with shell midden, some bone, and several *haangi*, overlying clay natural in which a number of features had been dug." (Davidson 1970, p.112). Excavation was done with trowels. The material was not sieved but all cultural debris that could be collected by hand-picking was retained for analysis with the exception of shell which was sampled only. Cooking stones were weighed by quadrant then discarded.

THE MIDDEN

It was possible to determine the spatial distribution of the midden layer to the north and south in squares 7 and 6 respectively and to the west in the same squares or else in the baulk which separated them from squares 8 and 9. The layer was nowhere found to continue into the latter two squares (Fig. 2). Davidson's (1970) prediction that the midden was a small discrete scatter predominantly representing the remains of cooking

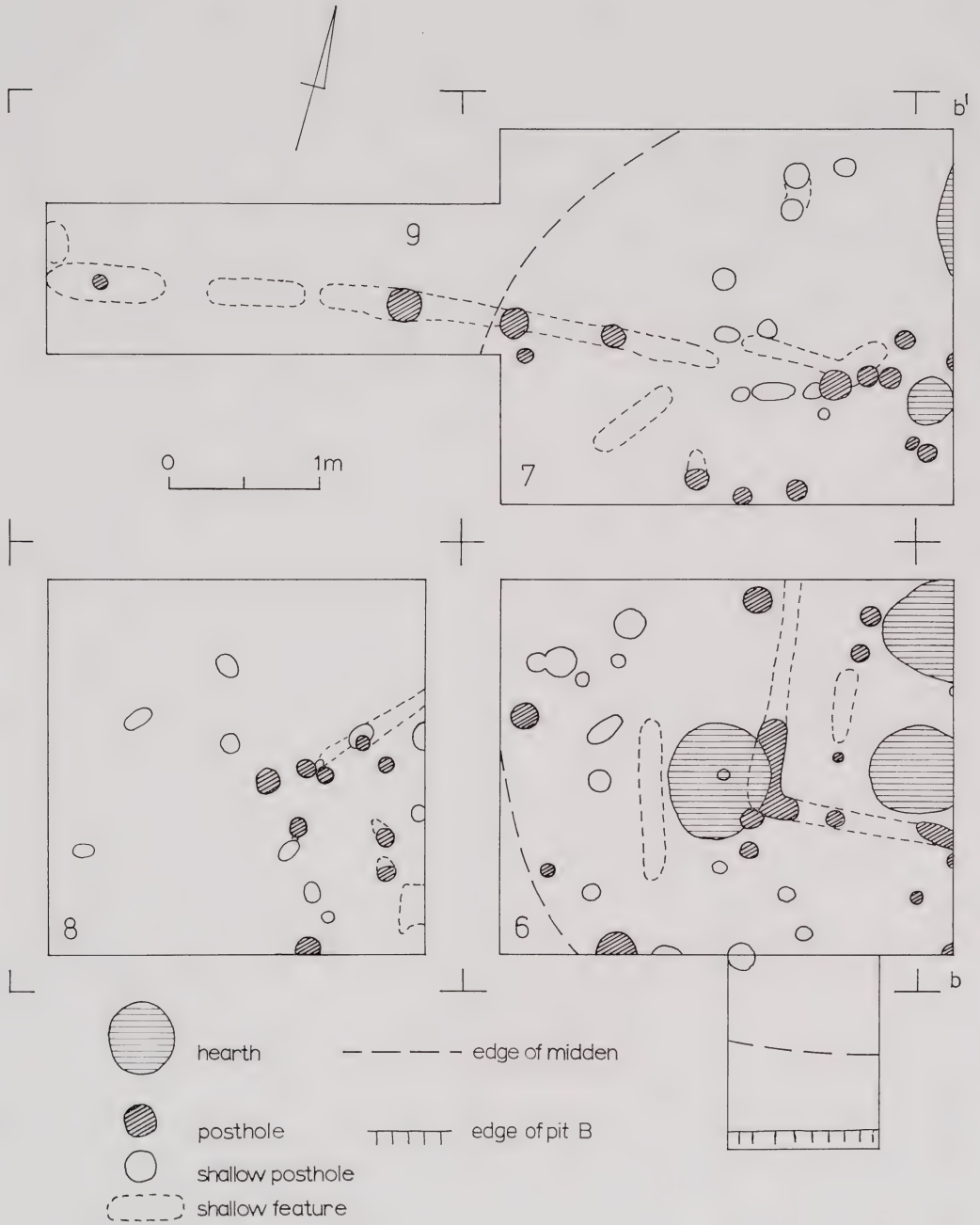


Fig. 1. Plan of the excavation.

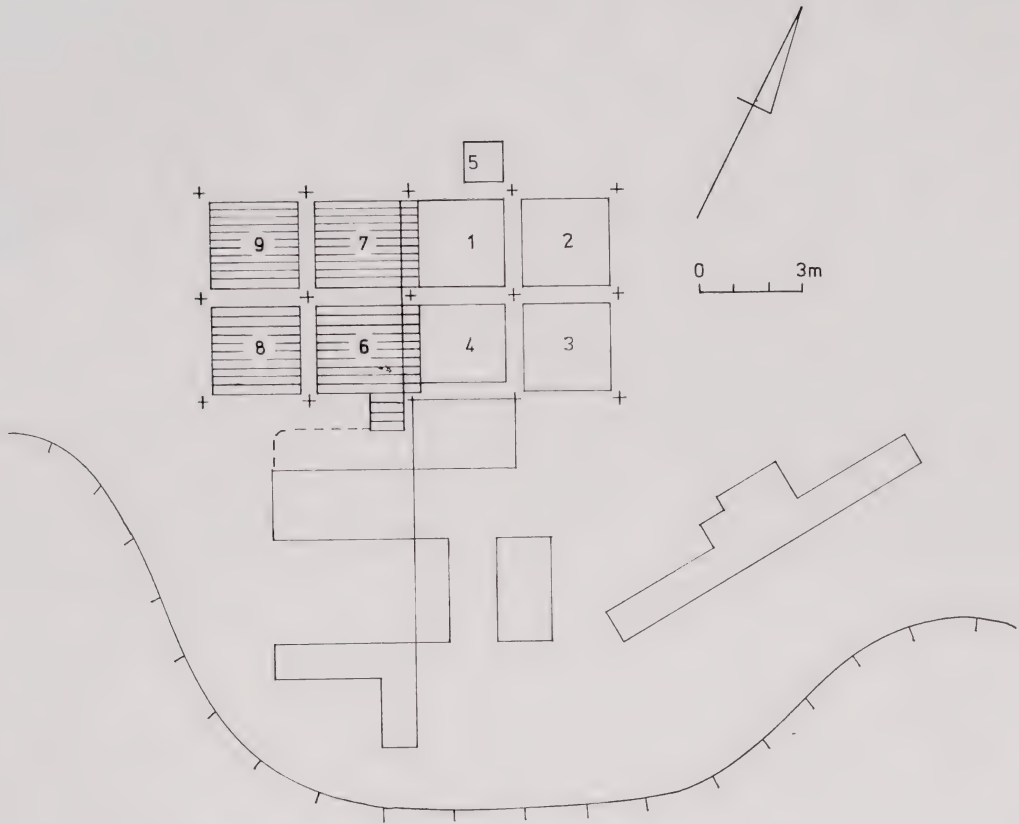
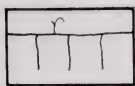
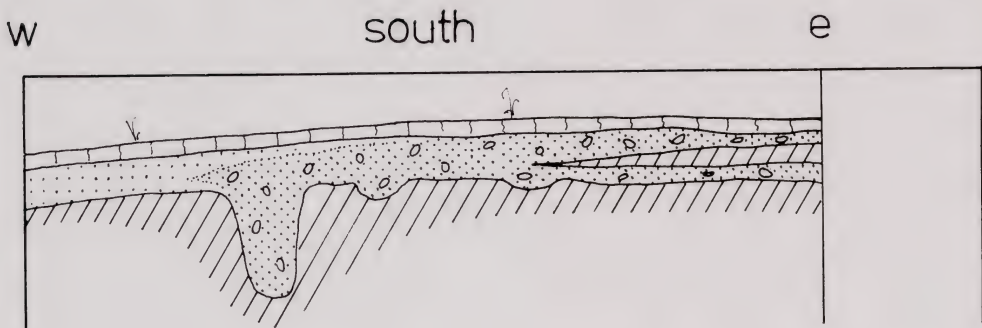
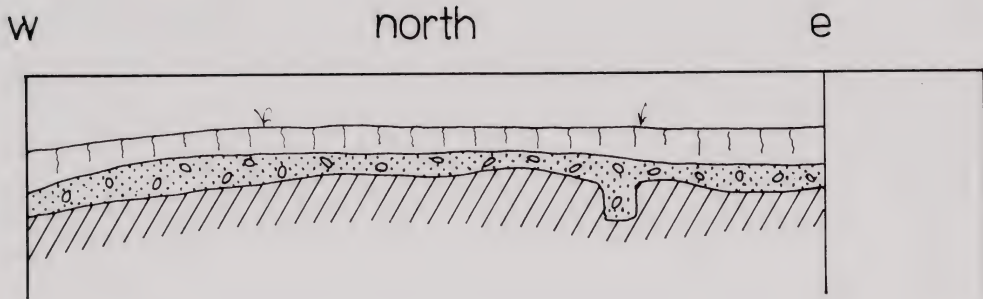


Fig. 2. Plan of features uncovered by excavation.

activity seemed confirmed. Below the midden, four shallow circular depressions cut into the clay natural provided evidence of burning. These were interpreted as *haangi*. Each of these structures contained the same material as composed the layer as a whole implying that their original contents had been removed. However, cooking stones occurred in abundance in the immediate vicinity scattered through the deposit. A lens of clay within the midden and visible in section (Fig. 3), is interpreted as the spoil deriving from initial digging of one of these features.

STRUCTURAL EVIDENCE

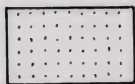
Also below the midden and apparently sealed by it was a profusion of postholes, some of which were associated in linear alignments taken to be the remains of surface structures and specifically of houses. Typically, the postholes were cut to a depth of *ca.* 25 cm into the natural. Normally they were circular in plan but a few had dimensions greater along the line of a posthole alignment than across it, suggesting that they formerly held wall slabs. Between the slab holes and postholes were continuous slots of approximately the same width as them but shallower in depth — *ca.* 15 cm. The evidence is entirely consistent with the view that construction consisted of posts or slabs set at intervals and interspersed with sections of wall of lighter construction (Davidson 1970, p. 116). These sections may have been made of split planks but at present there is no direct evidence to support the suggestion.



topsoil



midden



brown soil



yellow clay

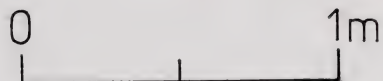


Fig. 3. Typical cross-sections, Square 6.

The evidence in Square 6 complements that of Square 4, namely that two or possibly three houses were superimposed and presumably succeeded one another in time without significant interval since they were found to be on the same alignment. It is now apparent that the length of the southern wall of the most recent house was in the region of three metres (Fig. 2; Davidson 1970, Fig. 4). It is noted that the most recent house is taken to be that least obliterated by subsequent activity.

In Square 6 both to the east and west of the western wall of the most recent house are the remains of the other two probable wall slots, which replicates the situation of Square 4. It may therefore be inferred that the southern walls of the three successive structures were of much the same length, although this inference is offered tentatively. It is more difficult to establish the other dimension of the latest house, since evidence for the same form of construction has not been found along the northern side. Here the situation is confused by a profusion of postholes and complicated by the absence of wall slots connecting them. Nonetheless it would seem safe to estimate the length of the most recent house conservatively at *ca.* 3 m.

Absence of continuous wall slotting has an interesting parallel with other cases of houses revealing this form of construction. At Mangakaware 1 the houses may also have been of lighter construction along their northern (and warmer) sides, although the position is not entirely clear (Peters 1971, p. 134).

The presence at the site of another house is implied by a further continuous posthole/wall slot structure, which starts in Square 7 and runs across Square 9 (Fig. 2). It has a minimum length of 4.5 metres. No evidence for a parallel wall is found inside the excavated area so presumably one may lie outside to the north. It is noted that this new structure does not overlap the other house area and moreover it has been found to be on the same alignment. This latter fact carries with it the suggestion that two structures may have been contemporary. Furthermore, the new putative house structure of squares 7 and 9 lies parallel to an alignment of some ten substantial postholes running diagonally across squares 1 and 2 described by Davidson as forming a "fence" or "stockade" (Davidson 1970, p. 119, Fig. 4). Had this stockade continued far enough west it would have lain adjacent to the new house as well as parallel to it. While this remains speculative, the alignments of the various structures argue for their contemporaneity. Finally, it is noted that the portion of the new wall which lay in Square 7 was located stratigraphically below the midden layer (Fig. 2) as did the succession of the two — possibly three — superimposed houses discovered previously.

As described above, a metre-wide extension of Square 6 was excavated south to the edge of Pit B in an attempt to ascertain problematical stratigraphic relationships. It was found that the midden did not reach the pit's edge. Had midden been found in the fill of the pit it would have established the latter as being the earlier. Conversely, had the pit been cut through the midden, the pit would logically have been later. Certainly, had the pit and the midden been contemporary one would not expect the midden to reach beyond its edge, and this was indeed the case. However, equally, the distribution of midden may be independent of the location of the pit. At present, all that can be said is that the evidence for houses lies below the midden while the temporal relationship of each to most of its pits remains unknown. Further excavation in progress at the time of writing is intended to reveal more information as to the disposition and relative ages of the features found in the site.

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